

APERF – Reviewing Podiatry in Practice

Diabetes affects approximately 800,000 Australians and that figure is predicted to rise to 1.5 million by 2010. As such, diabetes is a disease that places a huge burden on the health of Australians and the health care system. Research shows that diabetes-related foot complications are a leading cause of hospitalisation for people with diabetes; therefore, podiatrists have an important role to play in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of foot problems associated with diabetes.

Diabetes Australia recommends that people with diabetes visit their podiatrist at least every 12 months, and in accordance with best practice guidelines, podiatrists should conduct assessments on clients with diabetes.

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Researchers Shan Lawrence and Anita Raspovic used their APERF grant to investigate whether these guidelines were being implemented by podiatrists in practice.

More than 200 podiatrists participated in the study – 30% were male and 70% female, with an average of 10 years of practice; 60% were from the private sector and 32% were from the public sector.

The researchers found that whilst 84% of podiatrists surveyed reported assessing all patients with diabetes, the assessment procedures varied greatly, with over 16 different combinations of assessments recorded.

“It is encouraging that a significant number of podiatrists assess all patients with diabetes to some extent, and what is also encouraging is the high number of podiatrists utilising the currently recommended tools. However this study also highlights the need to reduce variation in current practice,” Ms Lawrence said.

“There also seems to be a belief that you need a lot of time and expensive equipment to carry out an accurate foot assessment on a client with diabetes. This is not the case. The most important tests are a vascular test to measure the



blood flow through the feet, a neurological to assess whether or not a loss of feeling has occurred, and a visual check to look for any structural changes to the foot, any lumps or bumps or wounds.”

According to Ms Lawrence, these tests should not be time-consuming and can be carried out with the minimum of equipment such as a monofilament (a tool for measuring sensation) and a

doppler (a tool for measuring the pulses through the foot). She said that in many cases even a doppler was not a requirement and palpating pedal pulses could be highly useful.

“While in general podiatrists routinely carry out assessments on patients with diabetes, our research shows that there is a need for a more cohesive, systematic approach to the assessment of this patient group,” she said.

Support Needed for Podiatry Research

Donate before the end of the financial year and capitalise on the available tax deduction.

Financial support for podiatry research has fallen well behind the funding available to other areas of medical research.

Podiatry’s significant contribution to foot health owes a lot to recent research. APERF grants fund high calibre research projects that use the highest standard of research methodology such as randomised controlled trials. A stronger scientific base has led to respected research outcomes that have credibility amongst the medical community, researchers, podiatrists and the public.

The vitality of the profession and the foot health of the community depend on this funding source.

Support APERF research by making a tax deductible donation today (details below) or by distributing the new APERF brochures to your clients and colleagues.

APERF Donations

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